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ABSTRACT

As a result of the recent growth in homeschooling in the United States, colleges and universities have received an increasing number of applications from home-schooled students. Admissions officers have found it necessary to assess whether and how their admissions requirements should be modified to allow fair review of the credentials submitted by homeschooled students, even though, as yet, relatively few applicants are homeschooled. It is estimated that about 50% of homeschooled students attend college. Research has shown that achievement test scores of homeschooled students are high, and the Home School Legal Defense Association reports that homeschoolers tend to score above the national average on college entrance examinations. A number of college admissions departments have set specific standards by which they judge homeschooled students, with most preferring to consider student portfolios, transcripts of coursework provided by parents, and the student's Scholastic Assessment Test or ACT Assessment test scores. The Higher Education Act requires that students receiving federal financial aid obtain the recognized equivalent of a high school diploma. To comply with this, some colleges have admitted home-schooled students only if they have earned a General Education Development (GED) diploma or have passed a federally approved test. Current evidence indicates that the performance of homeschooled students in college is comparable to that of traditionally educated students. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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DIGEST

Homeschooling and Higher Education

Patricia Wood

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Homeschooling and Higher Education

by Patricia Wood

Introduction

As a result of the recent growth of homeschooling in the US, colleges and universities have received an increasing number of applications from home-schooled students. Admissions offices have found it necessary to assess whether and how their admissions requirements should be modified to allow fair review of the credentials submitted by homeschooled students. As yet, relatively few applicants are homeschooled and limited information is available on college and university policies.

Although it is impossible to determine the exact number of homeschooled children in the U.S., most estimates confirm growing numbers. Five to ten years ago, researchers estimated that there were 500,000 to 1 million students in home-based education programs in the U.S. (Cohen, 2000). Findings from the Spring 1999, Parent Survey of the National Household Education Survey (Parent-NHES) estimated that 850,000 students nationwide were being homeschooled. In 1999, this was 1.7 percent of U.S. students ages 5 to 17 in the grade equivalents of K-12. Eighty-two percent of the homeschoolers were schooled at home only, while 18 percent were also enrolled in public or private schools part-time (Bielick, 2001).

According to the Parent-NHES, the majority of homeschoolers are white. Homeschooling parents have more education than nonhomeschoolers, while the average household income of homeschoolers in 1999 was the same as nonhomeschoolers. Parents cited several reasons for homeschooling their children-because they felt able to provide a better education at home, because of religious reasons, and because they perceived that their child had a poor learning environment in a traditional school (Bielick, 2001).

Apart from this survey evidence, several small-scale research studies offer perspective on the college-going experience of this first generation of home-schooled children. Rudner (1999) authored a peer-reviewed journal article that presents the results of the largest survey and testing program for homeschooling students to date and Galloway (1995) has prepared a paper on homeschoolers' academic preparation. Other information has been prepared by the National Center for Home Education and the Home School Legal Defense Association, two organizations that seek to advance homeschooling.

Are Homeschoolers Prepared for College?

Toch (as quoted in Galloway, 1995) estimates that 50% of homeschooled children attend college, the same percentage as children educated in public schools. But are these students skilled enough to compete successfully with conventionally-schooled students in the college setting? Galloway (1995) concludes that homeschoolers and traditionally educated students demonstrate similar academic preparedness for college and academic achievement. And

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according to Rudner (1999), achievement test scores of homeschooled students are high. The students' average scores were typically in the 70th to 80th percentile, with 25% of homeschool students enrolled one or more grades above their age-level peers in public and private schools. Christopher Klicka, Senior Counsel for the Home School Legal Defense Association, reports that homeschoolers tend to score above the national average on both the SAT and ACT, the primary tests used by colleges in evaluating college applicants. A study of 2219 students who reported their homeschool status on the SAT in 1999 showed that these students scored an average of 1083-- 67 points above the national average of 1016; similarly, the 3616 homeschooled students who took the ACT scored an average of 22.7-- 1.7 points above the national average of 21 (Klicka, 2002).

Homeschoolers and College Admission

Most colleges have received applications from homeschooled students and have developed policies for evaluating their records. A number of admissions departments have set specific standards by which they judge homeschooled students, with most preferring to consider student portfolios, a transcript of coursework prepared by parents, and the student's SAT or ACT test scores (Patrick Henry College, 2000). Cafi Cohen, author of The Homeschoolers' College Admissions Handbook, estimates that three-quarters of universities have policies for dealing with homeschooled applicants, and emphasizes that homeschoolers should seek early counsel from colleges in which they are interested-even prior to entering the 9th grade (Cohen, 2000).

Financial Aid and Homeschoolers

Because of regulatory requirements tied to student financial aid, some colleges and universities have raised questions about whether homeschooled students are eligible for admission and for financial aid. The Higher Education Act, the federal law authorizing financial aid, restricts schools from admitting students unless they have obtained a "recognized equivalent of a high-school diploma." To comply with this, some colleges have admitted home schooled students only if they have earned a General Education Development (GED) diploma or have passed a federally approved test showing that they have the "ability to benefit" from attending college (Morgan, 2003).

In June, 2002, Rep. Howard P. (Buck) McKeon introduced a bill (HR4866) that clarified that homeschooled students would not have to obtain a GED or pass any other standardized tests that colleges use to determine a student's "ability to benefit" from college. The measure was defeated on the House floor, but college officials expect the issue to re-emerge when lawmakers draft legislation in Fall 2003 to renew the Higher Education Act (Morgan, 2003).

How Do Homeschoolers Fare in College?

Current evidence indicates that homeschoolers' college academic performance is comparable to that of traditionally educated students. Oliveira's study (as cited in Galloway, 1995) found no significant differences in critical thinking skills among college freshmen who had graduated from different types of high schools, including home schools, public schools, conventional Christian schools, and accelerated Christian education schools (Galloway, 1995). Sutton and Galloway (2000) also investigated the undergraduate success of college graduates from home schools, private schools, and public schools nationwide. They used 40 indicators of college success that reflected five domains of learning outcomes-achievement, leadership, professional aptitude, physical activity, and social behavior. They concluded that, overall, the students from all settings received equivalent educations.

Additional Reading about Homeschooling and Higher Education

Home-Schooled Students & College Admission: Your Unique Approach to the Process
http://www.collegeboard.com/article/1,,5-25-0-56,00.html?orig=sch

And What About College? How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions to The Best Colleges and Universities
http://www.homeschoolteenscollege.net/what@college.htm (Chapter One)

College Admissions Policies. Good News: Homeschooler-friendly Colleges
http://www.homeschoolteenscollege.net/Policies.htm

The National Center for Home Education: Rating Colleges & Universities by their Home School Admission Policies http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000002/00000241.asp

Patrick Henry College, the first postsecondary institution for homeschooled students
http://www.phc.edu

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